

A moment with Steve Bainbridge

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Born in the UK but raised in Canada, Steve has always had a keen interest in sports and by all accounts was 'quite the sportsman' in his university days. Combining his love for sports by playing American football and his interest in the sciences, Steve attended Mount Allison University where he completed his undergraduate degree in biochemistry. Set to start studying for his Masters in biology, a conversation with a university professor led him to re-examine his future plans and consider a career in law.

"I remember having a conversation with a professor who was one of the most interesting individuals I have ever met and was also an excellent mentor to me and, despite his own illustrious career in research biology, he told me I should consider doing something 'more interactive with society'," recalls Steve and so 'on a whim' he decided to sit the Law School Admission Test (LSAT). He passed the test with flying colours and found himself returning to his roots with a move to the UK to become a student at the University of Manchester School of Law. There he swapped biology for a degree in law and American football for its northern English cousin, Rugby League.

"I had a great time in Manchester," says Steve. "It was a big change for me, going to a big city from my small hometown in New Brunswick but I loved being in the largest student centre in Europe and experiencing everything that goes with that; and, I really enjoyed studying law". After finishing law school, Steve moved back to Canada, this time to Vancouver, and articulated at Davis LLP, a large national firm. Steve remembered his old university professor's words and during his time at Davis, as a young litigator, he volunteered for a secondment program to the Crown Prosecution Service.

Spending 100% of his time on his feet in court, Steve gained invaluable experience although he admits the life experience in working with criminal matters from Vancouver's notorious Downtown East Side was a sobering experience. "Primarily, I represented the Crown at the morning intake in Vancouver Provincial Courtroom 100 at 222 Main Street, which can be a pretty daunting place. I was handling initial hearings for people who had been taken into custody overnight and woke up in police cells. It was largely a case of setting matters over for trial dates, issuing bench warrants, etc. – far from the glamour of storied trials – and some of the stories I encountered there were, on a fundamental level that has stayed with me, really quite sad. It certainly drew a contrast against the blue-chip corporate clientele I was working with back at the firm.

Steve remained at his firm for two years before being offered a role at a large firm in Japan, at the time renowned for its sports law practice. "It was a big move to consider, especially as by that time my wife and I had the first of our two children with us," recalls Steve. However, the chance to experience life in a completely different cultural setting and the opportunity to practice the kind of law he loved saw Steve and his family move to Tokyo, where they stayed for five years. There he practised a range of sports-related law, including advising one of the largest advertising agencies in Japan with regards to sponsorship deals and broadcast rights agreements of numerous sporting events including the 2002 and 2006 FIFA World Cup events.

Having now been joined by a son and with his daughter approaching school-age, Steve and his wife decided to move back home after he was offered partnership at a large firm in Atlantic Canada. There, Steve laughs as he talks about 'Canadian-ising' the kids by getting them involved in Canadian sports – "Skiing, skating, canoeing, camping... We did it all and it was great fun. It formed a strong connection and has added a few things we love to do as a family each time we return to Canada, depending on the season."

A few years later, thoughts returned of the family living abroad. “We looked at a few places and Dubai really stood out,” says Steve. “Then the opportunity came up with Al Tamimi & Company and everything fell in to place”. Steve spent three years working in the corporate commercial department in Al Tamimi’s Dubai office before leaving to become the General Counsel for Abu Dhabi Motorsports Management LLC, managing the central legal function of the iconic Yas Marina Circuit.

Three years later, in response to growing client demand for specialised legal counsel in the increasingly complex sports industry, Al Tamimi & Company decided to create a dedicated Sports Law practice and approached Steve about a return to the Firm. “I didn’t hesitate to say yes,” says Steve, “Al Tamimi is a great firm to work for and the opportunity to head up a team dedicated solely to sports law was my ideal job”.

Now based in the Firm’s Qatar office, Steve heads a talented team of lawyers who have experience in matters from tennis and athletics to motorsports and football. Whilst looking forward to Qatar hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup, the team are already engaged on numerous sports-related matters including sponsorship deals, venue management and sporting events and state that their vision is for the practice to be known “both locally and internationally as the go-to firm for advice on sports-related business with a Middle Eastern connection”. With the Middle East set to emerge as a prime sports market and the enormous potential for growth for sports in the region, the team look set for a busy next few years.

So which team will Steve be supporting at the 2022 Qatar FIFA World Cup? “Well if they qualify, Canada of course! Perhaps with Qatar as a close second,” he laughs.